

A stroll round Chester's walls



Keith Carter shows how to walk back in time to the days of the Romans



Boneswaldesthorpe's Tower

FOR anyone visiting Chester for the first time or for those who visit only occasionally for shopping or a family day out, the circuit of the walls is a delightful way of viewing the City through new eyes.

Where else in the British Isles, with the possible honourable exception of York, can you encompass the City centre entirely, joining or leaving at numerous places right in the heart of a bustling modern city with a strong historical thread leading back to the time of the Romans?

Chester is truly a jewel of a city and what better way to appreciate it and get to know it better than by walking

INFORMATION

Distance: Two miles.

Parking: Good parking in the city. For this walk, Gorse Stacks car park

Start and finish: Northgate

Maps: Chester City maps are available from the Tourist Office and from dispensers located at the main car parks. They cost £1.

There is also a very good pop-out map published by Compass Maps Ltd available from book shops or on line from www.mapgroup.net

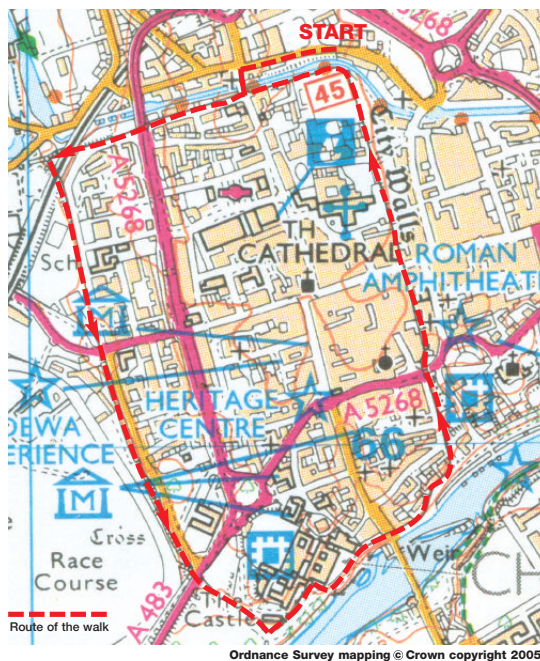
Useful book: The Chester Guide by Gordon Emery.

Public transport: Chester can be easily reached by rail and bus. National Rail Enquiries 08457 484950

Useful web site: www.chestertourism.com

Refreshments: Wide choice of establishments serving food and drink throughout the City – some would say more than enough!

Tourist information: Chester Visitor Centre, Vicar's Lane, tel 01244 351609. TIC, Town Hall, tel 01244 402385.



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round the walls? There are many places from where to start your walk but I recommend parking on the huge Gorse Stacks pay-and-display car park which adjoins the St Oswald's Way dual carriage way. Walk up George Street, left onto Northgate Street with the Bluecoat School on your right and go under Northgate, literally the north gate or entrance to the city.



**Top: Bridgegate
Above: The Albion pub**

Steps lead up onto the walls and you have a choice of turning right to walk clockwise round the walls or left to go anti-clockwise, which I suggest leads one through the historical time sequence more logically.

It was the Romans who established a stronghold here in AD 74, calling it Deva, a name that derives from the old Celtic word for the goddess of the waters. The first

defences were a turf wall, later faced with stone and it is known from carving on stone altars that it was garrisoned first by the Second Legion then by the 20th. When the Romans left the city became a Saxon stronghold to defend themselves against the incursions of the Vikings who could sail their longships right up to the walls. But back to our walk. Leaving Northgate, look over the wall on your right and see the canal which goes through a deep cutting below you. The tiny stone bridge spanning the cutting is known as the Bridge of Sighs, the name taken from the more famous one in Venice since its purpose was similar – to lead condemned men to their execution.

The first gate we come to is St Martin's Gate and to our right we can see the canal basin with Telford's Warehouse in evidence. Now a pub, it was once used for storage by the canal builders under the supervision of Thomas Telford the great canal-master of the late 1700s.

We come to a half-round tower known as the Goblin Tower and later Pemberton's Parlour after the owner of a ropeworks who oversaw his men's work from this vantage point. Then two more towers follow, the first we come to known by the tongue-twisting name of Boneswaldesthorpe's Tower and the second, not accessible to us, the Water Tower. This was a watch tower built in 1322 to keep a lookout for any hostile approach by river.



Above: The Shropshire Union Canal from the Walls at Northgate
Left: Gargoyles, Chester Cathedral
Above right: Distinctive cast signs help to find the way
Bottom right: The River Dee

The railway, now visible as we walk south, first came to Chester in 1845. Our attention though is likely to be taken more by the buildings around the entrance to the race course, one of the loveliest in England. Known as 'The Roodee', the land by the river was first recorded as being used for 'a game called foute boule' and it was not till 1893 that the first race meeting was held here. The name 'roodee' derives from the old word 'rood' meaning a cross and 'eye' or isle from the days when the river came up to the city walls. Indeed the Roman jetty can be seen as the wall curves as it nears Grosvenor Road. Cross the road and the castle comes into view on your left on its mound.

Although the site has been fortified from Norman times the present castle is a more recent structure, dating from its restoration in the late 18th century. To our right Grosvenor Bridge can be seen, opened by Princess Victoria in 1832, once the longest single-span stone bridge in Europe. We descend to the road running alongside the Dee and pass in front of the huge edifice of County Hall. On reaching Bridgegate, the Old Dee Bridge crosses the river to our right, at one time the only crossing into Wales. If you fancy some refreshments at this point the Café at the Walls is on hand just behind Bridgegate itself. Alternatively, go down



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the Recorder's Steps to The Groves, a riverside recreation area where boat trips can be taken. The recorder was the chief judge in the city and his house can be seen at the top of the steps. The walls turn north and to our right we can see the Roman Gardens symmetrically laid out with the famous 'hypocaust', an early example of under-floor central heating. We come to Newgate, once known as Wolf's Gate after Chester's first Norman lord, Hugh Lupus, the Wolf. We are in the heart of the City now and can look down on busy crowds enjoying the shopping including the celebrated Chester 'Rows', the black and white timbered, two-tiered buildings that date from the early 1800s.

If you can resist the lure of the retail urge you will soon see the famous Eastgate Clock built to mark Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. The original movement was replaced by a modern electric one in 1992. Go on, photograph it. Everyone else does! Continue on the walls but if you would like to visit the cathedral, if only for its excellent tearooms, take the next steps down to the left and walk through the Memorial Gardens. The present structure is Victorian, much of the restoration work being under the supervision of Sir George Gilbert Scott in the late 19th century. The modern tower is the Addleshaw Tower built in 1975 to house the Cathedral bells. We continue on our walk looking down to our left on the so-called Deanery Fields where excavations have unearthed the foundations of the Roman barracks. Ahead is King Charles' Tower, so named because during the Civil War, Charles I witnessed the return of his forces from the battle of Rowton Heath, a skirmish during which his Royalist forces took a beating

The walls turn west again, rejoining the course of the canal and leading us back to our starting point at Northgate.